

Dream a Little Dream of Me by mourntheantagonist

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence, Dreams vs. Reality, Hurt/Comfort, Implied/Referenced Child Abuse, Kid Fic, M/M, Married Life, Music, Mystery, Post-Episode: s03e08 The Battle of Starcourt, Pre-Relationship, wandavision - Freeform

Language: English

Characters: Billy Hargrove, Billy Hargrove's Mother, Eleven | Jane Hopper, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Neil Hargrove, Robin Buckley, Sam Owens (Stranger Things), Steve Harrington

Relationships: Billy Hargrove & Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington, Eleven | Jane Hopper & Billy Hargrove, Steve Harrington & Maxine "Max" Mayfield

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2021-05-14

Updated: 2021-05-19

Packaged: 2022-03-31 22:13:35

Rating: Mature

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 2

Words: 7,909

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

And there was nothing but darkness when his eyes had closed. Complete and utter silence, not even the crickets outside their window protruding through his ears. Just complete static until-

“Wake up Billy.”

“Wake up!”

or: what the fuck is going on?

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

hi! do people read the notes?? Idk. but this fic has a fun playlist to go along with it and you can find it right [here](#) if you're interested! I hope you enjoy!

Billy's eyes shot open and the series of dark nothingness came to a close with the incessant beeping of an alarm clock ringing in his ear. The morning sun was pouring in through the gaps in the blinds of the window above their bed, and the hazy rays illuminated the pale blue walls of their bedroom and reflected brightly against the white linen that covered their bare bodies and kept them warm through the night. Billy let out a lengthy yawn as he reached an arm over toward the nightstand to his left and with a firm slam of his palm he halted the morning buzzer. He rolled back over onto his side and rubbed the sleep from his eyes, the once blurry image slowly coming together to reveal pale skin peppered in a constellation of moles that Billy couldn't help but reach out and touch, tracing from dot to dot with the gentle drag of the pads of his fingertips. The same words just kept repeating over and over in his head. "It's Steve. It's Steve," and he couldn't help but let his lips turn upward into a smile. He was filled with a blissful contentment. He felt at peace.

The lonely sounds of only the birds chirping outside and the whistle of the wind and rustling leaves on trees were soon joined by a stream of high pitched giggles that slowly grew in volume paired with the echo of nearing, lightly stomping feet. Almost as soon as he heard the turning of the doorknob and the creaking of an opening door, a small, energetic figure found its way into the space between him and Steve on the bed. Bouncing up and down causing the bed springs to join the chorus and Steve to finally join the living just after he successfully slept through the blaring alarm.

The girl with brown wavy hair that was half fallen out of her pigtails secured by little yellow ribbons was practically on top of Billy while at the same time shouting in Steve's ears that it was time for breakfast. Steve just rolled over and planted a chaste kiss to his lips with his eyes still closed and still in that post-sleep haze. "Morning

sweethearts,” he said in his groggy voice before lifting the covers off of him with a dramatic grunt, revealing just a pair of blue navy boxers as his only clothing item until he tossed on the long purple bathrobe that hung from the hook on the outside of their closet doors. “What’s it gonna be? Waffles or pancakes?”

Steve picked up the little girl and threw her over his shoulder and marched out of their bedroom as she giggled with each bounce in his step, chanting “waffles” over and over again as if it wasn’t completely obvious. Billy, after several minutes of contemplation, pulled himself out of bed, throwing on a large discarded band tee that was draped over the chair, inside out and clearly worn, but he couldn’t care less about that. He just needed to warm up from the cold that came every morning when the covers were off and he didn’t have the body heat of another person to keep him warm.

Billy stepped out through the door into the hallway, immediately greeted by the smell of fresh batter and the sound of sizzling eggs on a skillet. Billy strolled through the halls slowly, dragging his fingers on the wall feeling the bumps in the texture along his fingertips. His bare feet sunk into the soft and thick carpet beneath him, filling him with that wonderful sense of home and belonging. He smiled when he passed by the colorfully decorated door that had a little sign made from construction paper and crayons where flower drawings surrounded the name “Elizabeth” written in bold blue marker on a yellow background. There were little lines drawn up and down the trim of the door frame where they marked her height every couple of months. She was already so close to four feet tall and at that rate would likely surpass both her fathers in height in no time at all.

Billy rounded the corner to see Steve standing at the stove mixing scrambled eggs into a pan while the waffles were cooking in the iron. Elizabeth was up on the counter pulling plates and cups from the cupboard because despite being tall for her age, she still couldn’t reach that high. Billy walked over to her and helped her down from the counter, handing the plates and bowls to her because she loved setting the table. It made her feel like a grown up despite needing help from an adult to get them down from the high shelf. Billy watched her trot all the way to the kitchen table before he quickly turned around and wrapped his arms around his husband who was

complaining about “slaving away at the stove.”

“It’s not my fault she likes your eggs better than mine,” Billy said into the crook of Steve’s neck, placing a soft kiss to the skin making Steve smile.

“If you knew how to crack an egg properly she might like yours too. Not everyone likes crunchy eggs Bill.” Steve responded.

“Well, at least I’m good at one thing. Coffee.”

“Yeah, yeah, you know how I like it,” Steve said, pushing Billy away toward the coffee machine, “well get to it hot stuff.”

Billy laughed as he pulled the coffee grounds from the pantry and started up a fresh pot of dark roast, humming the little tune that’s playing in his head to himself as the fresh smell of brewing coffee joined the chaos of smells in the kitchen. Billy pulled out two mugs, white ceramic with black lettering in a clean font that read “Mr.” on both of them. *Mr. and Mr. Hargrove-Harrington*. Billy simply couldn’t combat the grin.

And then, like a ring of a bell, he was reminded of something when he looked up to see the calendar hung on the refrigerator door.

“Hey, my folks are coming over for dinner tonight.” Billy said just as the realization hit him.

“Oh, that’s tonight? I’ll have to run to the grocery store after work then.” Steve responded simply, “What do you think, lasagna or spaghetti?”

“Uh,” Billy paused, “lasagna probably. My dad doesn’t enjoy working for his food.”

Steve laughed, saying “lasagna it is!” before pulling the finished waffle from the iron and adding it to the already high stack, but Billy had a weird feeling in his stomach that he couldn’t quite place. He just wrote it off as him being incredibly hungry for that stack of freshly baked waffles he was ready to drown in syrup and butter and sink his fork into.

The sun was beating in through the open garage against his back as he was hunched over, with his head underneath the hood of Steve's car, performing a long overdue oil change. His arms and hands were coated in grease, which wasn't great for someone who had a little girl standing at his feet holding a paper plate with a peanut butter and jelly sandwich sitting on it.

"I made you lunch daddy!" Elizabeth said, holding the plate up even higher above her head. Billy wiped his hands off on a grease towel, until most of the residue is transferred off of his hands, and he took the plate from her outstretched arms.

"Thanks darlin', but please tell me you didn't use a knife, your dad would kill me."

Elizabeth giggled and tugged down at the hem of Billy's shirt. "No!" she exclaimed, "I used a spoon. I can't scoop the jelly up with a knife. Too hard."

"What do you say I go wash my hands and we split it? Does that sound good?"

Elizabeth nodded her head and yelled from the garage for Billy to hurry up on rinsing the grease from his arms and hands, already taking it upon herself to split the sandwich in two right down the middle with a tear, because she was still barred from the knife drawer. Billy came back after only two minutes of her high pitched screams and took one of the two jagged halves off of the plate. They were both seated across from each other, criss cross on the dirty concrete floor, just watching each other as they ate their respective halves of the sandwich. Billy was just in awe while he looked at her. It just seemed so unreal that he could be so lucky to be married to Steve and have this sweet little angel in his life, and get to call her his daughter.

He was pulled from his trance of staring deep into those light brown eyes of hers reflecting the sun beautifully when she started to giggle hysterically.

“What?” Billy laughed, her giggle was as contagious as the common cold.

She just wiped at the corner of her mouth, an indication that Billy himself had something on his face, and what was Billy to do but take the sandwich to his face and smear a good solid streak of peanut butter and jelly mixture right across his cheek?

“Did I get it?” he asked, and Elizabeth just started to laugh even harder until she was red in the face and rolling onto her side because she couldn’t bear to sit up straight.

“No daddy! You made it worse!”

Billy just crawled over toward her, across the space between them, and wiped a dot of peanut butter off of his cheek and swiped it directly onto the tip of her nose.

“Oh look, you’ve got a little something too!” he said, and she just continued to laugh harder and harder until she looked like she could hardly even breathe. Billy just picked her up from where she was rolling on the ground and dirtying her clothes and carried her inside the house. “Let’s wash up princess.”

- : -

It seemed like no time passed at all between Steve walking through the door with his arms filled with brown bags of groceries, to the smell of cooking lasagna as it began to fill the house, and finally the ringing of the front door bell as it bounced off the walls.

Elizabeth was over in the dining room setting the table with the dishware that Steve’s mother had gifted them that was ten times nicer than anything they owned themselves. White ceramic with blue floral circling the rim, clean and shiny, and Elizabeth handled them with as much care as she would a fragile baby bird. While his husband and daughter were up to their own things, Billy went and answered the front door where there stood the whole color spectrum of hair. His father with his balding light brown which he’d never even dare to point out, Max and her fiery red with long beach waves, and his mother with her bright blonde that was still slightly damp

from another day out in the ocean.

There's a strange feeling in his gut. Something that makes him pause as he looks past the door frame at the three of them standing there, his mother holding a bowl of tossed salad with a bright smile on her face and the only thing he can compare the feeling to is sadness, a sadness he can't seem to properly place so instead he just waves it off and signals them to all come inside. Though, Max had already let herself in before he even had the chance.

"Where's my little niece?!" Max called from the front room, and not even a second later that same pitter patter of those little feet came stomping in and jumping up into Max's arms.

Before Billy could even react, Neil was pulling him in for a hug and once again he got a weird feeling that just didn't make any sense, except instead of sadness, it was fear. He tensed as his father touched him, a reaction that he wasn't in control of and had Neil pulling away quickly, giving him a confused expression to match his own.

"You okay son?" he asked.

"Uh, yeah." Billy replied. "Just a little jumpy today I guess."

"Alright, well," Neil rubbed his hands together. "I smell lasagna." he said, licking his lips and practically salivating at the mouth like a dog waiting for his dinner.

"Dinner's almost ready if you guys want to take a seat at the table."

They all followed Steve's suggestion and took their seats around the dinner table, Elizabeth sitting at the head like she always did, her little head just barely popping up over the table top because she insisted that she was too old for the booster seat. Billy reserved the seat in between him and her for Steve who would likely emerge from the kitchen with his hair pulled back into a bun despite its relatively short length for the sole purpose of getting Billy all excited. There was just something about seeing the nape of his neck all exposed like that.

The rest of the family took their own seats and started dishing out the

garden salad that his mother had brought. Billy dished up his own, Steve's, and Elizabeth's, sure to remove all of the tomatoes from his and his daughters plates onto Steve's, earning a huff out of his mother.

"Not only did you never learn to like tomatoes, but you're passing it on to the next generation?" She said it with offense as she popped a ranch coated tomato into her mouth. "You're missing out kiddo."

"So what are your plans for the evening?" Neil asked, drawing Billy's attention.

"Plans?"

"Yeah, you asked us if we could watch Elle tonight," he responded, "I just assumed that meant the two of you had something to do."

By the grace of god, Steve walked into the dining room at precisely the right moment to save a confused Billy.

"We're catching that new movie with Corey Feldman at the drive in," Steve said, holding a tray full of hot lasagna, Billy of course adoring the cute little apron with Elizabeth's painted handprints all of it and yes, his hair up in a bun. "Which reminds me, Neil can we borrow the truck?"

"For?"

Steve stalled. "Comfort?"

"Yeah huh." Neil rolled his eyes and slid the keys across the table toward Billy. "Please just, clean up after yourselves this time. For my sanity."

Billy was left completely speechless by the exchange, his eyes just darted back and forth between Steve and his dad, only able to let out an uncomfortable laugh about his father making reference to his sex life. Steve set the hot tray onto the table and took his seat next to Billy.

"Well, dig in everybody."

They pulled up to the drive in and set everything up with blankets and pillows in the bed of the truck and the radio tuned in to the specified frequency. They curled up next to each other and began snacking on the array of gas station treats they purchased on their way and waited for the movie to start, passing the time by making out under the stars like the rest of the crowd, feeling like they were teenagers in high school again.

The movie... wasn't great. They tried to watch it, they really did, but about midway through they had to stop. Maybe because the movie was bad, or maybe because they'd gotten a little too hot and heavy while they were waiting for it to start that they were both just sitting there, waiting for the other person to kindly suggest they avert their attention elsewhere.

Which they eventually did. Steve finally removed his hand from the bag of skittles and reached over and squeezed Billy's thigh just as *Dream a Little Dream of Me* started to play over the radio.

Stars shining bright above you,

Night breezes seem to whisper 'I love you'

Birds singing in the sycamore tree,

Dream a little dream of me.

Steve rolled over so that he was on top of Billy, lacing their fingers together up above Billy's head as Steve kissed him gently. When Steve came back up from his lips, all he could see was Steve's face and the bright and sparkling sky behind him. Steve pulled up the truck hatch for just that extra bit of privacy, despite part of the thrill being that they were in public, and went back into kissing Billy.

Despite the cold night air, Billy felt nothing but warmth. Every shiver that escaped his body was not a result of a chill breeze but rather the result of Steve paying close attention to all of those sensitive areas on his neck and his dull nails gripping tightly on his waist, sure to leave little white crescent shape indentations.

They didn't care that the truck bed creaked with every sudden movement they made and occasionally, despite both of their best efforts, a moan or a gasp escaped past their lips when one of them would hit just the perfect spot.

They never did see the end of the movie.

And they couldn't care less that they hadn't.

When they arrived back home, almost a quarter till ten, Elizabeth was already fast asleep in her bedroom, and Max was fast asleep on their couch. Billy's parents had helped themselves to several cups of coffee and looked to be overly relieved to see the two of them walk through the front door, all giggly, just like they were high schoolers again sneaking around town and hiding their relationship from their parents like Romeo and Juliet.

"She wear you guys out?" Billy asked, noticing the grass stains on the front of his dad's jeans that hadn't been there before they had left.

"She *insisted* on playing sharks and minnows in the backyard." Neil said, wiping away at his knees, "She's a fast little girl. Maybe she'll take up basketball like her daddies."

"Well she's definitely got the height for it." Billy's mom chimed in. "We better get going. Your father has work in the morning."

Billy tossed the keys over to Neil when he held out his hand. "Truck bed clean?"

"As a whistle." Steve answered.

"It better be."

"Goodnight guys." Billy waved them off, his mom holding up a half-asleep Max all the way out the front door while she groaned and mumbled the word 'tired' over and over again until the door shut behind the three of them.

Steve and Billy walked hand in hand into Elizabeth's bedroom and each gave her a kiss goodnight on her forehead, she was tired enough that she didn't even move a muscle at the touch, but still they were

sure to shut the door as quietly as they could so as not to wake her.

They definitely took a page directly out of Max's book because as soon as they were undressed and their heads had hit the pillow they instantly grew tired and slowly but swiftly fell into sleep.

And there was nothing but darkness when his eyes had closed. Complete and utter silence, not even the crickets outside their window protruding through his ears. Just complete static until-

"Wake up Billy."

"Wake up!"

2. Chapter 2

Hopper was startled awake by two small hands tightly gripping his shoulders and the familiar chant of his teenage daughter's voice. Her words were frantic, falling out of her mouth with vibrato and an airy tone, and in his initial half-sleep he didn't quite register what she had said until her voice had raised to a volume that, despite the distance, could be heard all the way from the center of town.

"There's something wrong!" She was screaming at him. Her nose was dripping with blood and her eyes were dripping with tears. She was shaking and scared and all Hopper could think to do was to take both of her hands and hold them tight.

"What's wrong?" he asked, as calmly as possible, his voice low and quiet, opposite of El's own.

"Something's wrong with Billy!" she tried to scream it, but all that came out was a choked whisper at the emission of his name. Her fists tightened in Hopper's grip and as soon as the name 'Billy' fully registered in his head, he suddenly had his guard up. He had to be wary after everything El had told him she'd seen when Billy had let her into his mind, and especially after getting a glimpse of all of it for himself the moment Neil Hargrove seemed entirely unconcerned over the state of his child when Hopper had taken it upon himself to inform the family. He figured it would be easier to hear from father to father, but when the first question that left his lips was "how much is this going to cost me?" he started to doubt the man he was talking to was even a father at all.

"I told you to stay out of his head El. That's—" invasive is what he wanted to say, but El was quick to cut him off by tearing her hands out from his grip and charging toward the front door.

"We have to go to the hospital. Right now."

She had that serious look on her face. The one she got when she was seconds away from throwing whoever was bothering her directly through a brick wall. She got the tears to stop rolling and wiped away the blood with her sleeve, something Hopper had to constantly

remind her not to do because he could never get the stains out. It was late, the moon and the stars were already so visible in the sky above them serving as their only form of illumination in the dark woods aside from the one pathetic light bulb that hung above the awning on the porch. The clock read almost midnight. Hopper was exhausted and wanted nothing more than to crawl back into his recliner and fall asleep, but El was determined, and if there was really something wrong with Billy, he didn't have the time to waste.

Hopper grabbed his hat and coat off the hook and followed El out to the Blazer where she was already sitting in the passenger seat, waiting. Her eyes were fixed forward and it was scarily opposite to what she had looked like just moments ago, full of panic and fear that showed itself through tears and screams, now manifesting itself in a dead expression looking out at the dark forest through the dirty windshield. All he could do was get in the driver's seat, turn the key in the ignition, and do what she told him to do.

The trip from Hawkins to Fort Wayne wasn't short, and yet, they didn't talk to each other the whole way. Hopper tried, tried to ask her what she saw but every time he did, her eyes would squeeze shut like she was in pain.

Because every time he asked, she was suddenly transported back there.

She'd been checking up on Billy for months now, ever since the early morning hours of July 5th when Max had begged her to tell her what was happening while they were huddled together in the back of an ambulance and not a single EMT or paramedic on site could tell them where or how he was. But there was something different about looking for Billy in the void compared to how it worked with everyone else. Usually, she'd be able to see just the physical. She would be able to see the people around them and hear the words that they said, but with Billy she didn't see that. She didn't see his torn up body laid out on a stretcher surrounded by doctors and nurses trying to bring him back to life like she would have expected, or hoped for at least. Instead, all she saw was Billy curled up in his own bed at home, the blue plaid sheets and the stained pillowcases that he let his head sink into, asleep. She couldn't see him physically, she could only see into his mind and into his dreams.

And *all* he ever dreamed about was sleeping in his own bed at home.

It was the exact same every time. No matter how close or far she would get to him, no matter the words she'd say and no matter how loud she would say them, he wouldn't even so much as stir. He was always motionless with steady and even breathing, and she would have thought it to be peaceful if she hadn't been able to feel everything he was feeling when she was in there.

Not the pain of being poked and prodded by the doctors who saw him as their little upside down experiment, but the pain of sadness and loneliness that seemed to just be a constant in his life within his own mind. It was way too much for any single person to handle, even if she hadn't had an inkling to what exactly the cause was. She could never stay in there for too long. The feelings were just too powerful.

It was always the same, until the day that it wasn't. Everything seemed to be going accordingly, he was in his bed, asleep, just like he always was, but the silence started to fade. Slowly she started to hear voices of different screams enter her ears from far away, growing closer and closer to her and to Billy. Suddenly the boy she never saw move was writhing in his bed. The screams grew closer and closer and louder and louder until they pierced her ears and she covered them with her hands and dropped to her knees. Billy's own screams were added to the chorus and the dark black void faded quickly to a blinding white that forced her eyes shut like the flash of a camera.

And like the flip of a switch, the literal blink of an eye, the voices stopped and it was all back to black. But when she looked up there was nothing. No bed, no Billy. Nothing.

And her first thought, the thought that rattled in her brain the whole trip from Hawkins to Fort Wayne, the reason she was so adamant that they leave for the hospital right away...

Was that he was dead.

She couldn't reach him or feel him anymore, and it was the only thing that made any sense.

Hopper called up Dr. Owens through his car phone and explained the

situation the best he could, with the limited information he could get out of El who wouldn't respond to a single word he said with anything but "drive". All he really had to go off of was that El had seen *something* and insisted that Billy needed help, that Billy needed *their help*, and Owens, being ever so intrigued with Eleven and her mysterious capabilities, wasn't going to turn her away.

They pulled into the parking lot and began working their way through each layer of the hospital, from the initial check in desk to the upstairs wing where emergent cases were being wheeled in on stretchers and moved behind closed curtains. They had to go deeper than the ICU where a case like Billy's would typically be located, but his case was anything but typical. Billy was in the deepest depths of the hospital that only select personnel had access to where lab technicians were having a field day treating Billy Hargrove who had Mindflyer DNA coursing through his veins. Their little science experiment. There was always difficulty getting permission to go back there as many of the nurses weren't even given clearance so surely the sheriff from two towns over was out of jurisdiction.

But they eventually got their way through the barricaded entrance, with Hopper constantly having to squeeze El's hand to remind her that no, she couldn't just force open the glass doors no matter how much she wanted to or how much the nurse behind the counter aggravated her.

The hospital wing Billy was in looked like it was straight out of a horror film. There were no nurses or doctors rushing from room to room, the lights were dim and it was mostly silent save for the squeaking of their soles against the linoleum floor. It looked very abandoned and lonely and straight up depressing, all doom and gloom where the first impression was that whoever was wheeled into any of these rooms, likely wouldn't be coming out breathing. Instead of being wheeled out in a wheelchair into the parking lot for a grand return home, they'd be wheeled out on a gurney with a white sheet covering their body headed straight for the morgue where Owens' little lab rats would likely continue their experiments on the dead corpse. El had been quick to release herself from Hopper's grip and locate the room on her own, storming down the halls with a determination he hadn't seen from her in a while. He had to do a

little jog to keep up with her, hearing his keys jingle from where they hung on his belt loop with every step that he took. El had stormed past everybody and went straight in for Billy, taking him by the hand and tightly shutting her eyes. She didn't even take a second to notice the two people who were already in the room before her, Max and Steve, asking frantically what was going on because El didn't even say a thing, and Hopper didn't have a clue either.

Steve was standing against the doorframe and Max was sitting in the chair looking like she had just been woken up. The two of them looked to have the same confusion plastered on their faces that Hopper had, all three of them looking toward El who stood at Billy's bedside silently with focus as her face turned red.

"I can't reach him." She said once she'd opened her eyes, releasing her hold from Billy's hand and focusing all of her attention on the heart monitor in the room that maintained a steady rhythm with the crests and troughs indicative of life.

"Can someone here explain to me what is going on?" Steve asked, his arms crossed over his chest. He was looking to Hopper who just gestured to El as if that was answer enough.

"Something is wrong with Billy."

"Billy's fine El, what are you talking about?" Max chimed in after releasing an exhausted yawn.

El just repeated herself, turned toward Max and staring her directly in the eyes. "Something is wrong with Billy."

"What is wrong with Billy, El?" Max asked, and Steve and Hopper just watched the scene take place before them like they were watching a movie, waiting for the plot to thicken.

"He's gone."

"No, he's still alive." Max protested.

"Not dead. *Gone*." El said, "He's somewhere else, on the inside."

Before anyone could question her further, Dr. Owens had entered the

room. "Is there a problem?" he asked, and everyone's attention had turned toward him where he stood in between Steve and Hopper.

El didn't respond, and instead let Hopper speak for her. "We aren't sure, but Eleven thinks something may have happened with the kid."

"Why don't the two of you come into my office and explain it to me? We have been monitoring him closely and haven't seen any significant changes." Dr. Owens suggested, leading the two of them out of the room. "You two keep him company, I know it doesn't feel like it now, but he knows you're here." he said, looking at Steve and Max before he closed the door behind him.

- : -

"So he just... vanished?" Dr. Owens asked, his hands were clasped together in front of him on his desk and he was looking to Eleven inquisitively, while she was slumped forward in the chair, her eyes shut tightly just like before, like she was in pain.

"Yes," she said, "and there were... screams."

"Whose screams?"

"Billy's, and others," she said, her voice trailing off into nearly a whisper, "there were so many. It was so loud." El choked on tears with that last sentence, and Hopper pulled her into his side. She covered her own ears like she was hearing it all over again. The screams of countless people were echoing in her mind. She just sobbed into Hopper's jacket.

"Are you sure this wasn't just a bad dream?" Owens asked. "Nothing has changed with him physically to suggest something is wrong."

El's head snapped toward him and her tear filled eyes filled with rage. "I know what I saw," she said, her face scrunched and eyebrows turned down, "and I can't reach him anymore."

Dr. Owens leaned back in his chair almost as if he was trying to distance himself from El. He knew how she could make brain smoothies with just the use of her mind alone, and he didn't like the idea of being on the receiving end of that. "Okay," he said, "we'll run

some tests, but I'm not sure how much it will help."

"Just do what you can Doc," Hopper chimed in, "for our peace of mind, please."

"I'll go order an EEG and an MRI. How 'bout you two go join the other two, maybe see if you can't reach him this time."

Hopper took El by the hand and led her out of the room. She didn't seem too satisfied with what Owens had to offer, but she was definitely less enraged than she could have been. They walked back down the same empty corridor they just walked through, dim lighting and all, and found Max pacing around the small square room, visible relief on her face as soon as El walked back through the door.

"What the hell is going on?!" Max asked, walking right up to El and putting her hands on her shoulders, getting right up into her face. "You can't just say something like that without an explanation!" El was just looking back at her with wide eyes, still red and glossy from earlier. "El, tell me that Billy is okay?"

"I-" she wanted to. She wanted to tell Max that everything would be okay just like she did with her on that mall floor, holding her as she cried right next to Billy's lifeless body, drenched in blood. But she couldn't. She couldn't look Max in the eyes and tell her that he was okay when everything inside of her was telling her that something was seriously wrong. "I don't know. I don't know." She shook and bowed her head.

That made Max take a step backwards, releasing her grip on El's shoulder and stumbling into the foot of the hospital bed.

"You said you couldn't see him, could you try again?" Steve asked, pulling a distraught Max who refused to cry into his side, "Just in case?"

El nodded and walked up to his bedside and pulled her blindfold out of her pocket. Hopper followed suit and turned the radio on the side table to a vacant frequency. She sat on the floor, her legs crossed.

She took a deep breath, and focused.

It was almost instant that she found herself back in the void, but it was still completely empty. She walked around aimlessly, her feet splashing in the water with each step she took, calling out his name only to hear her own voice echo back to her.

“Billy?” No response.

“Can you see anything?” It was Max’s voice breaking through, joining the continued echoes.

“Not yet.”

El went in deeper, and her stomach grew more and more tense with each step she took, and her breathing became more and more shallow, but still, nothing. Just pitch black like before.

But she kept going. She continued to move forward despite the uneasy feeling that washed over her.

Then a chill traveled straight down her spine as she heard the faintest little voice enter through her ears, a voice she couldn’t attribute to any of the people that were in the room with her, but also, unmistakably not Billy’s voice either.

“I hear a voice.”

“Is it Billy’s?” Max asked.

“No it’s...”

It was high pitched, sounded like a giggle. A girl. A young girl.

“It sounds like a young girl.”

El tried to tune out everyone’s follow up questions and focused every bit of her attention on that faint little voice that was slowly growing louder and more audible. She could almost make out the words that were in between the frantic fits of laughter.

“... Daddy!...” The word was as clear as day.

And then there was another voice. Another set of laughter that joined

the little girl. A low voice, slightly gruff and heavy.

“Billy.” She said it aloud, to where everyone in the room could hear the moment she realized. But as soon as she said his name, the laughter stopped. Suddenly.

It was replaced by the screams.

She was suddenly propelled backwards, like the strongest gust of wind hit her dead on and sent her directly out of the void. She ripped off the blindfold immediately and collapsed into Max’s arms, hands up to her ears, knees to her chest, sobbing, trying to get the sounds of the screams to exit her head.

“What happened?” Max asked, stroking her fingers through Eleven’s hair as she sobbed into her chest, just like she’d done for her, ignoring the blood from El’s nose as it transferred onto her shirt.

“I could hear him.” She said through choked sobs. “I could hear Billy.”

Max held onto Eleven tighter. Hopper and Steve were both just watching the scene happen on the floor, their backs against the walls behind them holding the bulk of their respective weights, unsure of whether or not they should intervene, or dare say anything. They didn’t want to drill her with all of the questions they had bouncing around inside their heads while the person with all of the answers was a wreck on the floor. So they stayed silent, let Max be the one to hold her while she choked back her own tears, and waited for it all to go away and calm down.

She didn’t have that chance before Dr. Owens walked in alongside another man in a long white lab coat, wheeling in a cart with a large machine on it, a machine El recognized very well.

“Did something happen Eleven?” Dr. Owens asked the girl with the tear stains running down her cheeks. She just nodded her head, still unable to properly vocalize or describe exactly what happened or what she heard. Dr. Owens noted her hesitation to speak and the looks being given to him from the other eyes in the room and decided to drop it, to not press any further. “We’re going to run an EEG to see

if there's any abnormal brain activity, just to make sure Billy's definitely still in there."

The man in the lab coat made his way over to Billy's bedside opposite of the rest of them and began marking points of Billy's scalp with what looked similar to a blue colored pencil. El had to look away, immediately reminded of the day they strapped her down in a chair and took clippers to her head, Brenner in her ear telling her "this will make everything much easier for everyone."

They attached the nodes all around his head, and the room was at a dead silence as they waited for it to be over, holding their collective breaths like they were trying to conserve oxygen in the room. Oxygen they might need later. El finally got up from her place on the ground and leaned on Hopper, back facing Billy. Max remained on the floor, her hand reaching up and holding onto Billy's. His hand was cold, but warm enough that she could tell the blood was still coursing through his veins, without the regular beeping of the heart monitor. Steve stood awkwardly in the corner, feeling out of place. He gripped his own hands behind his back and rolled on his feet, the only one out of the four of them that continued to look at Billy as the contraption was placed on his head. He stared at him almost intently, looking for any sudden movement, a twitch of his feet, a lifted finger, a flared nostril, just something.

But he got nothing. Billy was totally, and completely still.

"Uh. Dr. Owens?" The man in the lab coat said, looking down at the machine on the cart, his eyebrows furrowed, giving cause for concern. "Can you come look at this?"

"Is something wrong?" Hopper asked, his voice loud and his eyes wide like saucers. He was physically leaning forward, trying to see what they were seeing.

Dr. Owens didn't answer, he just hesitantly joined the lab technician behind the machine to get a better look, offering the group of four a hesitant look of reassurance, that wasn't very reassuring. He pulled his glasses from where they were hooked on the collar of his shirt up to his face.

“It’s just...”

“Scribbles?” the guy in the lab coat finished. Dr. Owens held the scan up to the light, like he didn’t know what he was looking at. Because he didn’t. He had absolutely no idea what he was looking at.

“What does that mean?” Max asked, her voice almost accusatory.

“There must be a problem with the machine. We’ll try again with a different one.” Dr. Owens looked to the lab technician and without him having to say a word, the man left to fetch another machine. Dr. Owens set the scan down on the bedside table and began removing the nodes from Billy’s head. Dr. Owens was trying to hide the look of confusion from his face, trying to keep everyone else in the room calm, but the girl with the fiery red hair and even more fiery personality couldn’t be calmed down.

Max continued to press with questions, alongside Hopper, but he had a little more tact in the way he asked for answers. But the two of them kept receiving the same exact response as they all waited for the lab tech to return with a second EEG machine. “We’ll know more when we get an accurate test.” Steve, on the other hand, remained silent and ignored the two who were begging for answers and receiving none. Instead, he walked over to the other side of the bed and stole the scan from on top of the table. Dr. Owens made no attempts to stop him. He just said “it’s only scribbles kid. It’s inconclusive.” but Steve ignored him, and walked back over to where he was initially standing and studied the scan, just like he studied Billy as he lay in that hospital bed. Lifeless. Completely, totally, still.

Dr. Owens just wrote it off and continued removing the nodes from Billy’s head, wracking his brain over how the hell the machine could malfunction like that. Max and Hopper continued to press with questions, and continued to get upset when they didn’t receive any answers, El continued to *not look* at Billy with all of the attachments to his head, and Steve continued to study the scan, drowning out every bit of background noise, looking at every mark that was made on the paper, like he knew something that everyone else didn’t.

The man in the lab coat came back shortly after with another machine, and everyone in the room was quick to shut up to hopefully

speed the process along. They stood and watched as they did it all over again, and El continued to refuse to turn around, and Hopper rubbed circles into her back, waiting for the good news he thought that he had been promised.

“It’s doing it again, sir.” the lab technician said, his voice was frantic, and that was what finally got El to turn around. Everyone was crowding the bed to see exactly what was going on. The pen was going haywire, and Dr. Owens immediately shut off the machine. “Are you doing this little girl!?”

El shook her head

“What the hell is going on Doc!?” Hopper was done being polite. He grabbed him by the fabric of his sleeve and pulled him in close. “What the *hell* is going on!?” He yelled.

“I... don’t know.”

“Does this mean he’s gone?” Max asked, finally allowing a tear to escape, rolling down her cheek as she choked on her own breath.

“No.” El answered. “He’s still here.” She was so sure, pushing past everyone and holding onto Billy’s hand. “I could hear him.”

In all of the chaos, nobody could hear Steve mumbling in the background. Nobody saw as his mouth hung open while he stared at the first scan in his hands. They didn’t hear him until his voice grew louder, and Max managed to pick out one of the words he said that made her head jerk towards him.

“What did you say?” She asked Steve, more tears streaming down her face. Everyone else in the room followed her step and now everyone was looking at Steve, who looked like he was in complete shock.

Steve looked up to her with his eyes wide.

“It’s Max.” he said, “it’s *you* .”

“What are you talking about son?” Hopper asked, inching closer to Steve.

Steve just turned the scan around and held it up for everyone to see, and traced his finger in a circle on the image. "It's Max. It's a picture of Max."

Suddenly nobody was crowding the bed anymore and instead crowding Steve, including Dr. Owens and his lab tech, all craning their necks to try to see past the scribbles.

"I don't see anything kid--"

"Wait!" Max shouted, cutting off the lab tech who spoke in a tired tone, "I see it! Right there!" She placed her finger on the scan. "See, that's my nose, my mouth... that's *me*..."

"I'm calling the others." Hopper said, "this is fucked up." Hopper made an attempt to leave the room and go to a phone but he was stopped by Dr. Owens pressing a hand to his chest. "Get out of my way this could be--"

"The Upside Down, I know. If that even is the case, the less people know, the better."

Suddenly chaos had broken out again between everyone arguing with each other about involving the others, and Eleven and Max just trying to shut everyone up, only making it louder.

But that was immediately halted by the sound of the radio in the corner turning on, and music began playing, but nobody was near it to even touch it.

"Who did that?" Dr. Owens asked, and everyone raised their arms in the air at once, signaling innocence.

The song was staticky, but they could still make out the words to a familiar song, and everyone's stomach dropped when they looked over to where Billy was lying on the hospital bed, just a single tear rolling down his face as the song eerily played in everyone's ears.

Say "Night-ie night" and kiss me

Just hold me tight and tell me you'll miss me

While I'm alone and blue as can be

Dream a little dream of me

Notes for the Chapter:

hopefully this chapter clears a couple of things up for everyone!! sorry for another cliff hanger, it's just what I do. Expect more haha. Thanks for reading!!!

Author's Note:

find me on tumblr: [mourntheantagonist](#)

comments and kudos are appreciated!! let me into your mind!!